

# ASHTANGA•YOGA•ASANA

STUDY BOOK 1



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# Ashtanga Yoga

## Introduction

### Getting It Together

Separateness causes suffering and union creates freedom. Yoga is union. It is the separation of our Self, each other, nature, and from something greater or higher (be it God, universal consciousness, or whatever term you want to use) that causes the anxiety and chaos symptomatic of our times. It is difficult for us to experience our natural connection with each other when we don't have that connection with our own Self. Yoga connects us with an inner wisdom, in which there is no doubt as to the connection of all things.

Now is the time for yoga. Yoga is a practical method of bringing peace and connectedness back into our lives. Because we are a reflection of our nervous system, the state of our nervous system dictates how we experience the world. If the nervous system is fresh and rested, the body will be healthy and the mind alert and comprehensive. As a result, our thought will be powerful and clear and our actions, which are manifested thought, will be successful and rewarding.

Yoga strengthens and purifies the nervous system so it can reflect a greater degree of consciousness and our lives can become an increasingly positive force in the world. If the methods presented in this manual are practiced correctly the whole nervous system is revitalized, the body enjoys better health and more energy, the mind is rested and freed from the endless burdensome thought of future and past, and perception is restored to its primal freshness. We can actually gain back the connection to self and others as we are released from the restricted thinking, dull mind, and negativity resulting from a strained, tired nervous system. The healthier our nervous system, the healthier our body, mind, thoughts and actions.

The purpose of this manual is to make these techniques available to all who are interested in enhancing the quality of their lives from the most fundamental foundation, the inner source. The idea is to promote self-practice and self-responsibility, to offer a tool for reconnecting. This is the place where yoga truly begins in each of our own individual lives. Yoga helps you rise to the challenge of living.

# The History of Ashtanga Yoga

As the story goes, the ashtanga yoga system was reconstructed from a mysterious manuscript written on a bundle of palm leaves, the Yoga Korunta. This collection of verses on hatha yoga was discovered in the 1930's by yoga master and Sanskrit scholar Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya and his disciple K. Pattabhi Jois while researching Sanskrit texts at a Calcutta university library. The manuscript is dated to be between 500 and 1,500 year old.

Krishnamacharya and Jois translated and reconstructed the ashtanga yoga series (originally there were six sequences of postures) and Pattabhi Jois, with the encouragement of Krishnamacharya, took the instructions as the basis of his practice and teaching. He is still teaching this method today in Mysore, India at the age of 85.

Ashtanga taught by Pattabhi Jois is a form of hatha yoga which focuses on asana (posture) and pranayama (breath control). Some people call this Ashtanga vinyasa yoga in order to distinguish between Patanjali's eightfold system and the ashtanga yoga described in this manual.

# Awakening the Fire Within SEP

## Vinyasa: Movement Breathing System

Ashtanga yoga wakes up the internal fire. It ignites the dormant flame of vital life energy within all of us. The vinyasa system works with the synchronization of deep, rhythmic breathing and movement. By linking the postures it creates a continuous flow of energy that heats up the body, bringing oxygen to the blood, nourishing the glands and internal organs, cleansing and purifying the nervous system, releasing unwanted toxins through perspiration. As the heat goes up toxins are burned up and out of the system creating a lighter and stronger body and a clear mind. The heat is not a physical experience it is an internal spiritual fire that burns through the fog of illusion and ignorance.

## Access All Areas

As the internal heat goes up, not only do the toxins begin to exit the system, but another amazing thing happens; the body begins to bend and move. As Pattabhi Jois says “even iron will bend with heat.” With this freedom of movement we are able to open up areas of the body that had been previously restricted or blocked. There is release, a feeling of lightness.

It is in these places that we can discover what yoga truly is. Yoga is not just a physical exercise or some new way to pass the time or fill the emptiness, but a method of bringing life and vitality back into those areas, awareness of the deeper, inner parts of ourselves. It is a reunion with that innate wisdom that we all possess, but seem to have lost touch with. Yoga was developed as a means of acknowledging or returning to the source of life.

As concentration increases, the breath, mind, body, and soul come into union, to entrainment. Ashtanga yoga is a focusing technique that joins the main life forces, beating in unison to an internal rhythm, your internal rhythm. With control of the breath the mind becomes calm, allowing one to tap into a flow state where there is no sense of time, where externally imposed barriers dissolve and there is a sense of oneness with the universe. As focus increases, there is an effortlessness, a lightness in the harmony of movement and breathing.

# The Breath of Life

## Feeding the Fire

In many languages the words for spirit and breath are the same. In Sanskrit it's *prana*, in Latin, *spiritus*, and in Hebrew, *ruach*. In Portuguese the word for taking in breath is inspiration, or spirit-in. They believe that an infant literally breathes its spirit into its body with its first breath. We breathe in life. Breath is the source of life and vitality. It is the spirit moving in rhythm in the body.

## Prana

Prana is a subtle form of energy. Prana literally means “breathing forth” the universal life force. Through practicing asana and pranayama, prana is brought into and stored in the body, increasing vitality. Prana mainly flows through the body in the *nadis*, or nerve channels of the astral body.

Prana exists as a negative energy as well as a positive energy.

Prana moves upward and *apana* moves downward. When the two unite at the Muladara chakra (base of spine), Kundalini (dormant cosmic energy) is awakened.



The most important nadi, or energy channel, (there are 72,000!) is the Shushumna nadi, which correlates to the spinal cord in the physical body. When kundalini is awakened it starts to move up the shushumna nadi, through the seven chakras toward higher states of consciousness.

In ashtanga yoga there are three locks or *bandhas* that are engaged throughout the practice to prevent the dissipation of, and direct the flow of prana in the body, and convert it into spiritual energy.

- Jalandhara Bandha prevents prana from escaping the upper body. [SEP]
- Uddiyana Bandha forces prana up the shushumna nadi. [SEP]
- Mula Bandha prevents apana escaping from the lower body and draws it up to unite with prana. [SEP]

# The Chakras

From bottom to top 7 Chakras:

1. Muladhara chakra - at the anus
2. Svadhishtana chakra - at the genitals
3. Manipura chakra - at the navel
4. Anahata chakra - at the heart
5. Vishuddha chakra - at the throat
6. Ajna chakra- between and behind the eyebrows
7. Sahasrara chakra - at the crown of the head

# Drishti

## Eye Play

The gaze is a focusing technique. By directing the gaze at specific points (the space just beyond the tip of the nose, between the eyebrows, etc.) the focus is directed inward. This brings more concentration and awareness into the movement. Keep the gaze soft.

The Nine looking places are called *nava drishtis*:

1. Nasagrai - The space just beyond the tip of the nose.  
This is used most often and is the primary drishti in the sitting postures. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
2. Ajna chakra - The space between the eyebrows (ex. Parsvottanasana/intense east stretch) <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
3. Nabi chakra - Navel center (ex. Adho Mukha Svanasana/downward dog)
4. Hastagrai - Hand (ex. Trikonasana/ triangle) <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
5. Padhayoragrai - Toes (ex. Sarvangasana/shoulderstand) <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
6. Parshva - Far to the right (ex. Supta Padangusthasana/reclining big toe posture) <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
7. Parshva - Far to the left (ex. Marichyasana C/Marchi's posture) <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

8. Angushtha ma dyai - Thumbs (beginning of Surya namaskara/sun salutation) [L][SEP]
9. Úrdhva drishti or Antara drishti - Up to the sky (Virabhadrasana A/warrior) [L][SEP]

## Practice Drishti

- Pay attention to your wandering eyes. What distracts you?
- Try to control the urge to look toward something moving in the distance. [L][SEP]
- Gaze at the space just beyond the tip of your nose for one minute. [L][SEP]
- Does sound distract your eye gaze? Smell? Notice how your senses direct your focus. [L][SEP]
- At different times during the day focus your gaze at specific points (the space just beyond the tip of your nose, navel, a spot on the wall) and see what it takes to make you look away. [L][SEP]

# Cleansing and purification: Meltdown

## Nauli kriyas

If you look around you, you'll notice what happens as we get older. The middle of the body begins to lose shape and collapse. Gravity is pulling us downward. Unless we are practicing some type of opposing technique, the whole solar plexus area, a major nerve center of the body, will become squashed. Not to mention the toxins that get trapped, the poor digestion that results, and the lack of oxygen to the abdominal region. *Naulis*, in conjunction with the bandhas, bring everything upward, inviting vitality back into the middle of the body.

These techniques keep the gastro-intestinal or alimentary system balanced, functioning smoothly. Naulis massage the internal organs, acting as an internal cleansing technique. Keeping you pure and clean, naulis remove sluggishness of the stomach, intestines, and liver, bringing back upward the ever caving-in abdominal region, which is crushing and suffocating internal organs as gravity pulls us down.

Don't let the fire go out. Keep the channels of the body pure and open the pathway for the oxygen to keep feeding the fire. It's best to practice on an empty stomach in the morning.

# Creating a Sacred Space<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

## Choose A Spot that draws you Inward

This is a time of focus. You acknowledge the space around you on which you are about to work. It should be quiet, with no interruptions. You pick a place for the feet and plant them, one by one, deliberately connecting with the earth beneath. Participation at this level is important, if the link between your body and the ground is formed there is a centered calmness.

Making a time and place for your yoga is essential for maintaining a regular practice. Choose a place that is warm and where there is enough room for you to move freely. It is helpful to practice at the same time each day, the optimal times being sunrise and sunset. Choose a spot that draws you inward.

Regular practice is the key to yoga. It is through practice that these seemingly impossible postures are mastered with comfort and ease within a reasonable time period. It is through practice that yoga becomes integrated in your life.

## **Practice**

Decide how much time you have to practice each day (be realistic) and how many times a week. Begin all session with naulis, sun salutation, standing posture, sitting posture, meditation, and finish with corpse.

# Chants

Ashtanga yoga traditionally has both an opening and closing chants. Because of yoga's ancient roots, chants (or mantra) are offered in Sanskrit (the ancient language of India), however their meaning is said to be universal as Sanskrit is the language of the heart.

## Ashtanga Yoga opening chants

The opening prayer is a blessing of gratitude offered to the lineage of teachers and their student who have enabled this ancient practice to survive through thousands of years so that we can experience its benefits today .The recitation of this mantra cleanses the energy of the space we have chosen to practice yoga, as well as preparing the mind, body and emotions for the forthcoming ashtanga sequence.

Om

Vande Gurunam Charanaravinde

Sandarshita Svatma Sukava Bodhe

Nih Sreyase Jangalikayamane

Samsara Halahala Mohashantyai



Abahu Purushakaram

Shankhacakrsi Dharinam

Sahasra Sirasam Svetam

Pranamami Patanjalin

Om

### Translation

Om<sup>[SEP]</sup>

I bow to the lotus feet of the Supreme Guru which awaken insight into the happiness of pure Being, which are the refuge, the jungle physician, which eliminate the delusion caused by the poisonous herb of Samsara (conditioned existence).

I prostrate before the sage Patanjali who has thousands of radiant, white heads<sup>[SEP]</sup> (as the divine serpent, Ananta) and who has<sup>[SEP]</sup> as far as his arms, assumed the form of a man holding a conch shell (divine sound), a wheel (discus of light or infinite time) and a sword (discrimination).

Om

## Ashtanga Yoga closing Chant

The Closing Prayer brings the practice to a peaceful end; sealing in the work done and offering the efforts of our practice to improve the state of the world.

Svasti Praja Bhyaha Pari Pala Yantam  
Nya Yena Margena Mahim Mahishaha  
Go Brahmanebhyaha Shubamastu Nityam  
Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu  
Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi

### Translation

May the rulers of the earth keep to the path of virtue For  
protecting the welfare of all generations. May the religious,  
and all peoples be forever blessed, May all beings  
everywhere be happy and free Om peace, peace, perfect  
peace

## Asanas

Asana is not a particular posture, but a state. Within the word asana itself are the connotations of strength and firmness, as well as the connotations of pleasantness and comfort. This is the balance we are trying to achieve, strength and flexibility, not only in the physical postures, but also in our mental state.

### Take the Ambition Out Of It

Everybody is unique and their progression in yoga is going to look differently than the person next to them. It is important to allow the asanas to arise out of an internal place rather than some externally imposed idea of what the posture should look like. As long as you are working at your peak, combining breath, bandhas, and movement, and you are gaining that internal sense of stretching and strengthening, you are exactly where you need to be. In the beginning, the physical aspects of the postures will affect you the most. In time, and as you progress, you will become more aware of the flow of prana, life force, moving through your body. As your practice evolves, these subtle, but deep movements will reawaken your awareness and control of your body, leaving you both relaxed and full of energy.

## To Flex Is To Stretch

By flexing your quads you will notice your hamstrings get a deeper stretch. As you pull your abdominals inward and upward you can feel the lower back lengthening. Maintain a flexed contraction within the stretch by engaging the opposing muscles. Don't sink into your knees or lock them. Always lift up the kneecap by flexing the quadriceps. Maintain awareness also of your elbows, shoulders, and wrists. The intention is to bring life energy into our bodies, for this we need awareness.

## Some Tips

- Visualize yourself in the posture before moving into it.  
Some of our resistance is just a conditioned mental idea that we cannot do the posture. Change the mental idea.
- Never force it. Allow the breath to move you gradually deeper into the posture. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- Focus on the breath to bring lightness, ease, and fluidity into the movement. This is not about contorting your body into some frozen posture; there is always movement in the stillness. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

- Be patient with yourself, notice that the more even your breath, the slower the breath, the easier the movement.
- Let the thoughts go by, notice them as just thoughts, and then let them go. [L] [SEP]
- Notice how persistent the mind can be. [L] [SEP]
- Feel the breath as an extension of the bandhas. [L] [SEP]
- What happens to your spine if you connect breath and bandhas as you move into a posture? And if you don't? [L] [SEP]
- As you flex the front of your thigh (quadriceps), notice the extended stretch on the opposite side (hamstrings). [L] [SEP]

## Integration: The Challenge

The true challenge is not can you do a handstand, but can you apply yoga to your life? Yoga truly begins when you leave the classroom. Yoga is a way of living. Every posture reflects something about our internal state. Some days you may have trouble with the balancing postures and notice you are having trouble juggling all the different things in your life. Another day you may discover you're not as flexible as the day before, perhaps you've become a bit less fluid in your thinking or actions, resistant to stretching

yourself a bit further.

Flexibility • strength • grounded • balance • centered •  
clarity • lightness • wholeness • peace – these are all directly  
applicable, translatable to our daily lives. Nothing is  
separate. The path of least effort is one of union, yoga. Take  
the lesson of your classes and apply them to your life.

# **Sun Salutation: the dawning of a ritual**

## **Ritual connects us to the absolute**

By tradition, at dawn, the yogis practiced greeting the sun with a salutation. A yoga session is incomplete without it. An ideal exercise to get you moving, Suryanamaskara welcomes the new day, preparing for the asanas, heating up the body, toning up the muscles, quickening and intensifying the respiration and cardiac rhythm. The sun salutation is the foundation of your practice; it establishes the connection of movement and breath, uniting body, mind, and spirit

Not only is the sun salutation a preparation for the rest of your yoga practice, but also it is a complete exercise within itself. Surya namaskara tones up the digestive system by the alternate stretching and compression of the abdominal region. It massages the inner organs, stomach, liver, and spleen . It activates digestion and aids in reducing constipation. Synchronizing breath with movement, the lungs are thoroughly ventilated and the blood oxygenated, creating a detoxifying effect. The sun salutation steps up cardiac activity and blood flow throughout the system, which is ideal for the health of the body. By stretching and


bending the spinal column with this sequence of movements, through the skin, lungs, intestines, and kidneys. Strengthening the potential breathing ground increases immunity to disease.

Concentration and the maintenance of an uninterrupted rhythm throughout the succession of the sun salutation are key. Synchronize breath with movement and connect with the rhythm, your own internal rhythm. Start by practicing three round. Gradually increase to five or six.




## Practice: Surya Namaskara A

Begin in

- 1. Samasthiti:** Stand equally on your feet. Balance your weight. Big toes touching each other. Engage your thighs and abdomen. Roll your shoulders back. Keep your arms parallel to your body. Fingers spread.
- 2. Urdhva Hastasana:** Inhale, bring your hands up, keep your arms straight, join your palms and look up to the thumbs. Keep your shoulders back and down. Gaze at your thumbs.
- 3. Uttanasana A:** Exhale, bend forward from your hips, engage your quadriceps and place your palms on the ground. Feel the stretch on your hamstrings. Gaze at the tip of the nose.
- 4. Uttanasana B:** Inhale, bring your head up, come up onto the fingertips, straighten the spine and gaze at third eye. 
- 5. Chaturanga Dandasana:** Exhale, flatten your palms, bend the knees and jump back (or step back). Bend the elbows, keep them close to the chest and lower the upper body. Gaze at the tip of the nose.
- 6. Urdhva Mukha Svanasana:** Inhale, roll over the toes,

straighten your arms, bring your body forward, open your chest, roll your shoulders down and keep your thighs away from the ground. Gaze to the sky.

**7. Adho Mukha Svanasana:** Exhale, press down with your palms, straighten your arms, lift your hips towards the ceiling, bring your heels towards the ground, engage your legs and lift up your sitting bones. Feel the stretch on your spine and hamstrings. Gaze at the navel. Hold for 5 breath.

**8. Uttanasana B:** Inhale, jump (or walk) forward, bring your feet between your hands, lengthen the spine, open your chest, look forward, keep your arms straight and place your fingertips on the ground. Make sure you're bending from the hips. Gaze between the eyebrows. 


**9. Uttanasana A:** Exhale, place your hands on the ground parallel to your feet, bring the crown of your head towards the floor, relax the neck, feel the stretch on your hamstrings. Gaze at the tip of the nose.

**10. Urdhva Hastasana:** Inhale, come all the way up, open your chest, raise your arms up over your head, bring your palms together, keep your back straight and gaze at your thumbs.

**11. Samasthiti:** Exhale and bring your arms down to the side.

## Practice: Surya Namaskara B

Begin in

1. **Samasthiti:** Stand equally on your feet. Balance your weight. Big toes touching each other. Engage your thighs and abdomen. Roll your shoulders back. Keep your arms parallel to your body. Fingers spread.
2. **Utkatasana:** Inhale, bend your knees and squeeze them together as you sink your pelvis down to the floor, raise your arms up, open your chest and join the palms together. Keep your knees behind the toes and your shoulders relaxed. Gaze at your thumbs.
3. **Uttanasana A:** Exhale, straighten your legs, bend forward from your hips, engage your quadriceps and place your palms on the ground. Feel the stretch on your hamstrings. Gaze at the tip of the nose.
4. **Uttanasana B:** Inhale, bring your head up, come up onto the fingertips, straighten the spine and gaze at third eye. 
5. **Chaturanga Dandasana:** Exhale, flatten your palms, bend the knees and jump back (or step back). Bend the elbows, keep them close to the chest and lower the

upper body. Gaze at the tip of the nose.

6. **Urdhva Mukha Svanasana:** Inhale, roll over the toes, straighten your arms, bring your body forward, open your chest, roll your shoulders down and keep your thighs away from the ground. Gaze to the sky.
7. **Adho Mukha Svanasana:** Exhale, press down with your palms, straighten your arms, lift your hips towards the ceiling, bring your heels towards the ground and engage your legs to help you lift up your sitting bones. Feel the stretch on your spine and hamstrings. Gaze at the navel.
8. **Virabhadrasana A (right foot):** Inhale, step your right foot forward between your hands so that the knee is in line with the ankle, rotate the left foot 45 degrees, lift your arms and torso up, join your palms, engage your abdomen, lengthen the spine, keep your left leg straight and your hips square. Gaze at thumbs.
9. **Chaturanga Dandasana:** Exhale, lower the hands to the ground, step the right foot back, bend the elbows, keep them close to the chest and lower the upper body. Gaze at the tip of the nose.
10. **Urdhva Mukha Svanasana:** Inhale, roll over the toes, straighten your arms, bring your body forward, open


your chest, roll your shoulders down and keep your thighs away from the ground. Gaze to the sky.

**11. Adho Mukha Svanasana:** Exhale, press down with your palms, straighten your arms, lift your hips towards the ceiling, bring your heels towards the ground and engage your legs to help you lift up your sitting bones. Feel the stretch on your spine and hamstrings. Gaze at the navel.

**12. Virabhadrasana A (left foot):** Inhale, step your left foot forward between your hands so that the knee is in line with the ankle, rotate the right foot 45 degrees, lift your arms and torso up, join your palms, engage your abdomen, lengthen the spine, keep your right leg straight and your hips square. Gaze at thumbs.

**13. Chaturanga Dandasana:** Exhale, lower the hands to the ground, step the left foot back, bend the elbows, keep them close to the chest and lower the upper body. Gaze at the tip of the nose.

**14. Urdhva Mukha Svanasana:** Inhale, roll over the toes, straighten your arms, bring your body forward, open your chest, roll your shoulders down and keep your thighs away from the ground. Gaze to the sky.

- 15. Adho Mukha Svanasana:** Exhale, press down with your palms, straighten your arms, lift your hips towards the ceiling, bring your heels towards the ground and engage your legs to help you lift up your sitting bones. Feel the stretch on your spine and hamstrings. Gaze at the navel. Hold for five breath.
- 16. Uttanasana B:** Inhale, jump (or walk) forward, bring your feet between your hands, lengthen the spine, open your chest, look forward, keep your arms straight and place your fingertips on the ground. Make sure you're bending from the hips. Gaze between the eyebrows. 
- 17. Uttanasana A:** Exhale, place your hands on the ground parallel to your feet, bring the crown of your head towards the floor, relax the neck, feel the stretch on your hamstrings. Gaze at the tip of the nose.
- 18. Utkatasana:** Inhale, bend your knees and squeeze them together, raise your arms up, open your chest and join the palms together. Keep your knees behind the toes and your shoulders relaxed. Gaze at your thumbs.
- 19. Samasthiti:** Exhale, straighten the legs and bring your arms down to the side.